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ABSTRACT

This discussion paper provides background information describing the service base of adult literacy education programs in Washington State and highlights local initiatives to coordinate services. Based on "The Washington State Literacy Resource Directory," the report identifies 102 local service providers of literacy services to adults. About one-third of these programs are in community or technical colleges; about half are in King County, with 11 in Pierce County. More than half the programs receive funding from the Office of Adult Literacy; about 40 programs offer individual or small group instruction exclusively by volunteers. The amount of collaboration among providers varies greatly. This description of the adult literacy education service base is followed by a brief description of the range of roles providers fulfill, such as referrals, intake and assessment, instruction, coordination of volunteer tutors, support services, case management, and job development and placement. The report then provides a list of considerations that serve as a basis for examining some options for creating an effective and efficient infrastructure for adult basic education. Options for providers include the following: (1) develop local consortia; (2) work toward different outcomes; (3) manage services to different groups; and (4) serve populations at different points on a literacy continuum. The report concludes that no options can be implemented effectively until state leadership and action is directed toward the following areas: demonstrating a commitment to collaboration among agencies at the state level; establishing policies about state goals, priorities, and practices; ensuring that shared definitions of literacy and purposes for literacy education are used; promoting collaboration by providing incentives and rewards; and allocating resources based on the roles of the various providers. (KC)

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A Series of Discussion Papers for the Adult Education Advisory Council

ReDirection: Options for Policy and Practice in Adult Literacy in Washington State

Roles of Providers

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An understanding is emerging that an instructional program is only one piece of the large network of persons, organizations, and relationships that must be established if there is to be a major improvement in literacy in the United States.

–Hanna A. Fingeret in *Leadership for Literacy, 1990*

OVERVIEW

Since the Adult Education Act of 1966, the service delivery system of adult basic education in Washington State has greatly expanded. As new funds have become available, providers of adult basic education services have increased in number and diversified. However, concerns have been raised recently about the overall organization of the adult basic education delivery system and its effect on outcomes, quality, cost and availability of services.

Clearly defining the roles of providers and establishing linkages between education, job training and human services organizations will strengthen literacy education in the state by:

- Enhancing the visibility of literacy issues
- Providing integrated services to adult learners
- Improving recruitment, placement and retention
- Increasing the rate of successful outcomes
- Utilizing existing resources more efficiently

Foremost is the need to determine the different strengths of the many organizations involved in literacy education in the state. Once these roles have been clarified, linkages can be established leading to cooperative planning, policy and funding decisions, and ultimately to improved services to adult learners. At the same time, better coordination among the host of agencies and organizations can serve to leverage resources more efficiently, thereby increasing the quality and quantity of services statewide.

The background information in this paper describes the service base in Washington and highlights local initiatives to coordinate services. It is followed by a brief description of the range of roles providers fulfill. A list of considerations serves as a basis for examining some options for creating an effective and efficient infrastructure for adult basic education.

THE STATE OF THE STATE

At the present time, the field of adult literacy is characterized by a complex array of service providers and funding sources. This section addresses the numbers, types and roles of literacy providers in the state and recent initiatives to collaborate.

Eighty percent of adult basic education students are served in programs funded through the Office of Adult Literacy.[1] While there are a few other literacy providers in the state, they are not mentioned here because information and data is not readily available. The Office of Adult Literacy (OAL) of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges distributes federal and state funding to 57 providers: 42 programs under the Adult Education Act, 10 programs under the McKinney Act, 14 English as a Second Language programs, 27 volunteer literacy programs, 4 workplace literacy programs and 18 family literacy programs. Nearly all workforce preparation programs such as JTPA or JOBS that offer basic skills contract instruction to colleges or community-based organizations (see Appendix A). The role of these agencies is significant because, while they do not directly provide literacy instruction, they have funding for basic skills and provide many of the support services that are critical to the success of adults in literacy programs.

The Washington State Literacy Resource Directory published by Washington Literacy includes information about 102 local service providers of literacy services to adults. The following information from this directory illustrates the broad diversity of types and distribution of services:

- Approximately one-third are community or technical colleges
- About half (58) of the providers are in King County
- 11 are in Pierce County
- Over half receive funding through the Office of Adult Literacy (OAL)
- About 40 programs, including 31 local literacy councils, offer individual or small group tutoring exclusively by volunteers
- Four programs serve exclusively young people between 13 and 19, or 16 and 24
- 13 programs serve only ESL, while 18 do not list ESL among their services

Overall, the services offered by all adult literacy providers vary greatly subject to local conditions, funding requirements, organizational structures, etc. It is difficult to characterize services in the state or to determine which programs are delivering the best services.

The amount of collaboration among these providers also differs greatly. Most of the programs funded by Adult Education Act funds have some kind of cooperative contact or funding relationship with business and labor, community-based organizations, immigrant or refugee agencies, Private Industry Councils (PIC), literacy organizations, Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS), and Employment Security. These relationships vary from membership on advisory committees, to referrals of clients to co-location.

A common model is a coalition of one professional provider of literacy instruction, one volunteer organization, and Employment Security, DSHS, or a PIC. In Yakima, several years of close coordination have culminated in the use of computers and modems to allow providers and educational institutions "read only" access to intake and testing information collected by

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[1]William Zumeta. (1992). *Adult Basic Skills Services and Needs in Washington State.* University of Washington.

the JOBS caseworker. In another example, collaboration among instructional providers developed into the Pierce County Literacy Coalition which includes representatives from four colleges, three community-based organizations, and the local literacy council; as well as business, labor, libraries, media, United Way, and students. In 1993, the coalition served 7,014 people.

Programs that have successfully built collaborative relationships consistently point to several conditions:

- Commitment to shared goals
- Willingness to forfeit some recognition and identity
- Open, honest and frequent communication
- Commitment to partnership

There is also agreement about the barriers to coordination of services:

- General lack of resources
- Time, given part-time staff and large case loads
- Differences in goals, definitions, standards about program quality, and measures of success
- State and federal regulations including categorical funding and multiple application and reporting requirements
- Lack of knowledge about other agencies and formal networking opportunities

Recent research emphasizes the importance of providing comprehensive and integrated educational services to respond to the complex needs of adults with low basic skills. For example, the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs found that there is a direct correlation between the number of instructional hours learners complete in programs and the number of support services they receive. Through coordinated efforts, some adult literacy programs provide education and the full range of support services with signs of success. Through leadership in determining how these cooperative efforts can best be structured, comprehensive services that use limited resources most efficiently can be extended throughout Washington State.

RANGE OF ROLES

In seeking to define how the various roles should be organized and distributed, it is necessary to outline the many varieties of services that are offered in adult basic education programs and contracting agencies.

Referrals

Many referrals to literacy programs in Washington State occur within the process of assessment for other services, principally JOBS, JTPA, or through one of two student referral organizations in the state. Literacy providers sometimes cooperate with organizations that work with specific groups, for example churches, unions and community development agencies.

Intake and Assessment

Collecting information about learners for goal setting, reporting and assessing skills proficiency in reading, writing and math is often the first step in provision of services. Intake procedures are sometimes completed by a social service agency before clients are referred to a literacy program, but they are often duplicated or expanded by the instructional provider.

Instruction

Instruction occurs in a variety of settings, modes, time frames and contexts. The most common forms of instruction are group or individualized by professional teachers and aides or by volunteer tutors. Most literacy programs provide instruction in basic skills—reading, writing and computation in an academic or life-skills context. However, increasing attention is being given to the new basic skills including problem solving, critical thinking, personal management and affective skills. Some instruction is specifically aimed toward employability, including on-site workplace literacy, employment-related workforce literacy, vocational English as a Second Language, career development, specific job skills and work experience.

Coordination of Volunteer Tutors

Volunteer tutors receive training and are matched with ether individual adult learners or small groups. Many tutors receive initial and in-service training from Washington Literacy or the Tacoma Community House Training Project through a grant from the Office of Adult Literacy.

Support Services

Counseling, child care, transportation, health care, legal assistance, shelter, nourishment, mental health and other services which are vital to reduce the barriers to participation are offered based on learner eligibility and usually paid for by agencies other than the literacy provider.

Case Management

Many literacy learners receive services from a variety of providers. Therefore, a central point of coordination and management allows information about an individual's needs, educational progress and goals to be shared.

Job Development and Placement

Literacy programs that focus on skills for employment also may have the resources to provide job placement opportunities for learners. The providers work with employers to place learners in temporary or permanent jobs.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR IDENTIFYING ROLES OF PROVIDERS

1. Does the framework clarify the roles of various providers in order to avoid duplication or fill gaps in meeting state literacy goals?

2. Is the framework of the various providers flexible enough to adapt to local conditions?

3. Does the framework take into consideration the differing strengths of different organizations (staff qualifications, link to target populations, location, relationship with other organizations, etc.)?

4. Does the framework provide the full range of services adult learners need?

5. What degree of coordination and technical assistance will be required?

6. Does the framework make effective use of available resources?

POLICY OPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The options presented provide organizing frameworks for building capacity and creating a true *system* of delivery in Washington State. They serve to both clarify roles and promote collaboration. At issue is the need to strategically plan how literacy will be delivered in the state by the host of literacy providers. Central to all of these approaches is strong state leadership to prevent fragmentation while retaining the flexibility of a multi-organizational system.

Providers Develop Local Consortia

This option, based on a Virginia model, would require all providers in a locality (county, city, or group of counties and cities) to develop a comprehensive plan and submit a single application for federal and adult literacy funding based on a need formula. This option compels providers to look at the functions necessary to provide a *system* of services which facilitates learners' access to education, training, and support services. In one local example, Mason County, Washington, several organizations each provide a discrete function, such as instruction, case management or support services. Here, a community-based organization, a community college, DSHS, the school district, and the library together provide a system of services from information and referral to support services and follow up. In a statewide model, the funding requirements would give incentives for local consortia of providers to determine the best framework for their local conditions and population and to build on the strengths and abilities of each partner in the consortium.

Consideration	Implication
Clarity of Roles	Duplication or gaps in the delivery system are likely to be discovered and addressed with this local planning approach.
Flexibility	Since local providers develop their own comprehensive plan for delivering services, this option is very flexible.
Provider Strengths	Information about program strengths and capabilities would be determined and shared in the local planning process.
Full Services	There is no guarantee that each locality will be able to provide all services.
Degree of Coordination	A high degree of coordination and collaboration is required at the local level.

Best Use of Resources	The comprehensive planning process required for application has the **potential of** using limited resources effectively without overextending the capacity of individual programs.

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Providers Work Toward Different Outcomes

The majority of literacy programs in the state do not target specific outcomes for their students. In this option, programs would actually be funded to focus on specific outcomes such as employment, GED certification, transition to college or community development. All aspects of the program would be geared toward the intended outcomes and would be held accountable to achieving them. Learners would be attracted to programs that match their own instrumental goals.

Consideration	Implication
Clarity of Roles	Roles will be clearly defined by the specific outcomes selected by the programs. However, there may still be gaps or duplication.
Flexibility	A variety of outcomes is possible, which allows programs to select outcomes that are appropriate for the local population and need for services.
Provider Strengths	More information about which providers can best impact which outcomes is necessary before this model can be adopted.
Full Services	Targeting specific outcomes does not guarantee that a full range of services will be available to all students.
Degree of Coordination	Coordination is not a requirement of this option, but would facilitate full provision of services.
Best Use of Resources	Program resources would be focused more narrowly, thereby promoting more efficient use of resources.

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Providers Manage Services to Different Groups

Several literacy programs currently cater to specific groups of adults largely as a result of funding stipulations. But as a whole, the delivery system is unspecialized. Through application or assignment, local programs would become responsible for managing and/or providing services to a specific group or groups. Student level, goal, employment status, eligibility, etc. could all be ways of grouping. Based on research on student recruitment and retention, a specialized approach such as this has the potential to reach more students in need and retain them longer.

Consideration	Implication
Clarity of Roles	There is no control over duplication or gaps in service in a local area. Several programs might end up serving the same groups of students similarly or certain groups might be neglected.
Flexibility	Flexibility is built in so that local programs will target groups based on the local population and their needs for services with regard to the state priorities for service.
Provider Strengths	Tailoring programs to different groups of learners requires information about which providers have the ability to serve which types of learners best. For example, are volunteer tutoring agencies best able to serve individuals with the lowest literacy skills?
Full Services	Learners are more likely to receive comprehensive services in a system based on case management.
Degree of Coordination	Providers will need to coordinate with other instructional and social service agencies.
Best Use of Resources	Specialization combined with case management make this an efficient option but it is a complex way of awarding funding.

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Providers Serve Populations at Different Points on a Literacy Continuum

This option is a variation on the previous option. In this option, the groups are identified by their designation to a specific point on a literacy continuum that leads to state goals. Placement is based on the amount and kinds of services they need to move to the next point on the continuum. This option proposes that different providers are funded to serve individuals at discrete points on the continuum and provide services to take them to the next point. Programs would be held accountable for a specific and reasonable amount of student progress, rather than, for example, expecting better employment to be a direct result of participation in a basic skills program.

Consideration	Implication
Clarity of Roles	The roles of different types of providers are clearly defined and the structure of the continuum makes gaps or duplication unlikely.
Flexibility	In areas of the state where there are few providers, this option might be difficult to implement.
Provider Strengths	Specific information about outcomes and student populations which programs are best able to serve is required before this model can be adopted.

Full Services	Services by the providers working with different populations on different outcomes may not have fully integrated services for students.
Degree of Coordination	A high degree of coordination is necessary to insure that students are appropriately placed and promoted to the next level of service.
Best Use of Resources	Highly coordinated and focused services will utilize existing resources more.

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CONCLUSION

While there is widespread recognition that the roles of various providers need to be defined and literacy efforts need to be coordinated it is up to decision makers to provide a statewide framework for organizing and evaluating the delivery system as a whole. The options presented here are examples of possible frameworks, however, no option can be effectively implemented until state leadership and action is directed toward:

- Demonstrating commitment to collaboration among agencies at the state level.
- Establishing policies about state goals and outcomes, priorities for service, and effective practices.
- Insuring that linkages are built upon common definitions of literacy and shared purposes of literacy education.
- Providing incentives and rewards to support collaboration built on the strengths of partners.
- Allocating resources based on the specific roles of the various providers.

The establishment of a collaborative infrastructure which makes a comprehensive range of services available is vital. The causes and effects of literacy and the needs of learners go far beyond basic skills. Learners come to programs with diverse strengths, needs and goals. Their success, and our success as a state, depends upon a holistic system of services.